

FORT GRIFFIN
state historic site

EDUCATION PACKET



Fort Griffin powder magazine

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INTRODUCTION

Fort Griffin State Historic Site is located on 506 acres along the Clear Fork of the Brazos River. The site is 15 miles north of Albany on U.S. Highway 283 in Shackelford County. It overlooks the ghost town that was once the town of Fort Griffin or, as locals called it, “The Flat.”

The fort was constructed in 1867 and was deactivated in 1881. The ruins include a 45-foot -deep, hand dug water well, mess hall, barracks, library and a rock chimney that was once part of the officer’s quarters. Other remains include the sutler store, administration building, a cistern, powder magazine, First Sergeant’s quarters, restored bakery and two replicas of the enlisted men’s huts.

Fort Griffin is also home to the Official Texas State Longhorn Herd, which is co-managed by the Texas Historical Commission and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

All educators and students are welcome to participate in the educational programs offered at Fort Griffin State Historic Site. Educators who find that their topic of interest is not covered in the program descriptions are encouraged to contact the site manager to request a program on that topic. We will try to build programs if the requested topic relates to our mission of interpreting the natural, cultural and historic resources of Fort Griffin State Historic Site. Please call 325.762.3592 for more information.

TEKS CONNECTIONS

One of our main goals at Fort Griffin State Historic Site is to provide quality outdoor learning experiences for the children of Texas. Our education programs are correlated to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for elementary and secondary public schools. The list of TEKS connections below is not exhaustive and the educators may find that other standards are covered by the programs as well.

The following Grade 4 Social Studies TEKS are supported by this program:

- (4) History. **The student understands the political, economic, and social changes in Texas during the last half of the 19th century.** The student is expected to: (A) describe the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Texas; (B) explain the growth and development of the cattle and oil industries; (C) identify the impact of railroads on life in Texas, including changes to cities and major industries; and (D) describe the effects of political, economic, and social changes on Native Americans in Texas.
- (9) Geography. **The student understands how people adapt to and modify their environment.** The student is expected to: (A) describe ways people have adapted to and modified their environment in Texas, past and present; (B) identify reasons why

people have adapted to and modified their environment in Texas, past and present, such as the use of natural resources to meet basic needs; and (C) analyze the consequences of human modification of the environment in Texas, past and present.

(13) Economics. **The student understands patterns of work and economic activities in Texas.** The student is expected to:

(A) explain how people in different regions of Texas earn their living, past and present; (B) explain how geographic factors have influenced the location of economic activities in Texas; (C) analyze the effects of immigration, migration, and limited resources on the economic development and growth of Texas; (D) describe the impact of mass production, specialization, and division of labor on the economic growth of Texas; (E) explain how developments in transportation and communication have influenced economic activities in Texas; and (F) explain the impact of American ideas about progress and equality of opportunity on the economic development and growth of Texas.

The following Grade 7 Social Studies TEKS are supported by this program:

(6) History. **The student understands how individuals, events, and issues shaped the history of Texas from Reconstruction through the beginning of the 20th century.** The student is expected to: (A) identify significant individuals, events, and issues from Reconstruction through the beginning of the 20th century, including the factors leading to the expansion of the Texas frontier, the effects of westward expansion on Native Americans, the development of the cattle industry from its Spanish beginnings, the myth and realities of the cowboy way of life, the effects of the growth of railroads, the buffalo soldiers, James Hogg, Cynthia Parker, and Spindletop; and (B) explain the political, economic, and social impact of the cattle and oil industries and the development of West Texas resulting from the close of the frontier.

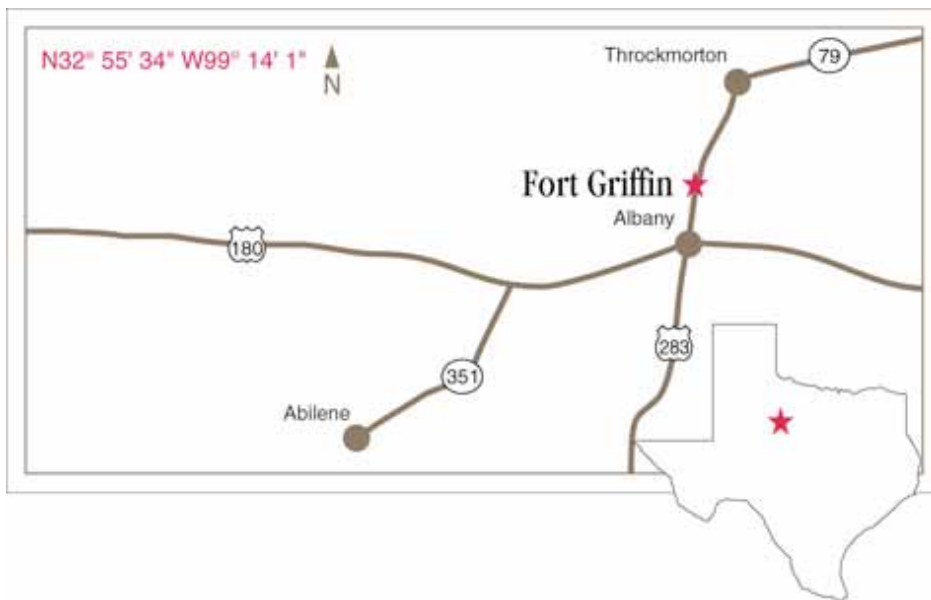
(10) Geography. **The student understands the effects of the interaction between humans and the environment in Texas during the 19th and 20th centuries.** The student is expected to: (A) identify ways in which Texans have adapted to and modified the environment and analyze the consequences of the modifications; and (B) explain ways in which geographic factors have affected the political, economic, and social development of Texas.

SITE INFORMATION

Fort Griffin State Historic Site
1701 N. US Hwy 283
Albany, TX 76430
Phone: 325.762.3592
Fax: 325.762.2492
Website: www.visitfortgriffin.com

Directions and Map

The site is located 15 miles north of Albany on US Highway 283.



PROGRAMS

Educational programs and tours are available Monday through Saturday. Although programs may be scheduled any time of the day, please note that those including hiking are recommended for the morning during warm weather.

Reservations

Please call the Fort Griffin State Historic Site office at 325.762.3592 to schedule a program.

Admission

Park entrance fees for school groups are 50 cents per person (students, educators and chaperones). There are no additional fees charged for educational programs.

Arrival

Please plan to arrive at the park headquarters a half hour before the scheduled time for your program. Arriving early will allow time for a restroom break, paying admission and a brief orientation with the site staff. Site staff will meet with your group at the headquarters and assist you to the program's location.

HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Water

Dehydration can occur quickly while hiking on our trails. Please bring more water than you think the students will drink. Dehydration and heat exhaustion are more likely to occur during our West Texas warm weather, but can occur even on cooler days as well. We recommend that visitors drink about one liter of water per hour while hiking on warm days. **Only those students who are carrying sufficient water will be allowed on hiking tours.**

Clothing

Long sleeves and pants are recommended for hiking to prevent scratches from the many prickly plants along the trails. Closed toe shoes are required for the trails; no sandals are allowed. Hats and sunscreen help to prevent sunburns and insect spray will repel some biting insects.

Be Aware

Rattlesnakes, Cottonmouths and Copperhead snakes are all common in our part of Texas. Also common are scorpions and centipedes. When out on the trails it is a good idea to be aware of your surroundings at all times.

Special Needs

Please let the park know if any students, educators or chaperones have health issues or conditions that require special needs.

Adult Supervision

For a safe and orderly outdoor learning experience we recommend a ratio of one adult supervisor to every 10 students.

HISTORY OF FORT GRIFFIN

The Fort

Shortly after the Civil War, the U.S. Army, in an attempt to protect American settlers from raids by groups of Kiowa and Comanche Indians, reactivated a number of western forts that had been abandoned with the outbreak of the war. Some of the abandoned forts, such as Fort Belknap, suffered from a lack of a reliable water supply. The attempts to reoccupy that fort were abandoned in 1867 and the search for a better location in the area began.

On July 31, 1867, Col. S.D. Sturgis led four companies of the 6th U.S. Cavalry to a temporary encampment in the river bottoms of the Clear Fork of the Brazos River and established Camp Wilson. In 1868, the name of the camp was changed to Fort Griffin, after the recently deceased Charles Griffin, commander of the Army's Department of Texas.

Both cavalry and infantry units made up the military presence at Fort Griffin, including 9th and 10th Buffalo Soldier Cavalry units and the 24th Buffalo Soldier Infantry unit.



Picket cottages and wood stoves

As a military establishment, Fort Griffin was something of an afterthought of the Army throughout the life of the post. Plans for permanent structures were drawn up and approved, but most were never built. The Army had to request for funds from the U.S. Congress for building materials and skilled labor for these projects.

In the meantime, temporary structures were made from what ever the soldiers could use, such as “raw hide” or green lumber. The “raw hide” lumber warped from the weather as it dried, making the structures cold and breezy in the winter and hot and drafty in the summer. Foundations were chiseled from limestone. Alternative means of housing were canvas picket cottages.

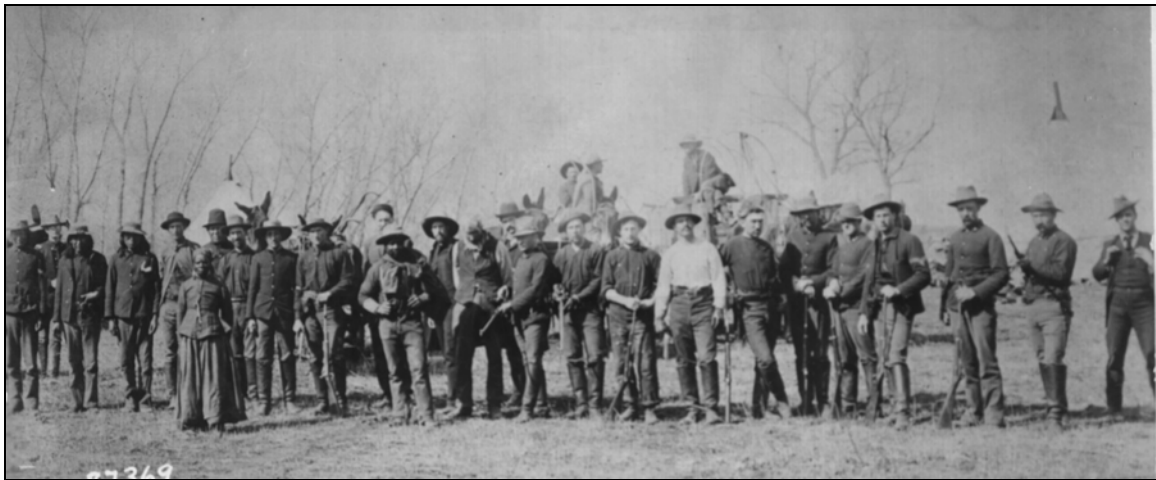
Fort Griffin would become a major base for the military campaigns known as the Indian Wars. Col. Ranald Mackenzie used Fort Griffin as a supply base during his 1871– 1872 campaigns against the Comanche. The 4th Cavalry's route from Fort Griffin to the High Plains later became known as the Mackenzie Trail. Mackenzie's campaigns helped to eventually end the threat of the Comanche and Kiowa and forced their relocation to the reservation at Fort Sill in Oklahoma.

In 1873, it was recommended that Fort Griffin be abandoned when departmental commander Christopher Auger characterized the post as “unfit for human habitation.” The Army had invested little in the infrastructure of Fort Griffin and on May 31, 1881, the post was abandoned.

Daily Life at the Fort

Daily life for the troops was harsh. During the 1860s and 1870s, the western defensive forts were more like run down villages and the enlisted men's barracks or living quarters were poorly ventilated, infested with rodents and very dirty. These conditions often led to diseases such as dysentery, diarrhea and tuberculosis becoming rampant among the troops.

Food rations at Fort Griffin consisted of beef, bacon or salt pork and what fruits and vegetables were in season. Hard tack crackers were also issued to troops while on campaign. Hard tack is a flour and water mix that is baked until hard and dry. They were often so old that weevils had infested the crackers. These crackers were so disliked they were given names like "tooth dullers," "sheet iron crackers" and "worm castles." The soldiers worked seven days a week with July 4 and Christmas Day off and they only earned \$13 per month.



The 4th Army Cavalry

Buffalo Soldiers

Nearly 16 months after the end of the Civil War, Congress authorized the formation of two new regiments of cavalry composed of African American soldiers known as Buffalo Soldiers. On September 21, 1866, the 9th cavalry regiment was activated at Greenville, Louisiana, and the 10th cavalry regiment was activated at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

At that same time, four regiments of African American infantry, designated the 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st Infantry Regiments, were organized. The 38th and 41st were reorganized in November 1869, as the 25th Infantry Regiment, with headquarters in Jackson Barracks in New Orleans, Louisiana. In April 1869, the 39th and 40th regiments were reorganized as the 24th Infantry Regiment, with headquarters at Fort Clark, Texas.



Buffalo Soldier Bugler

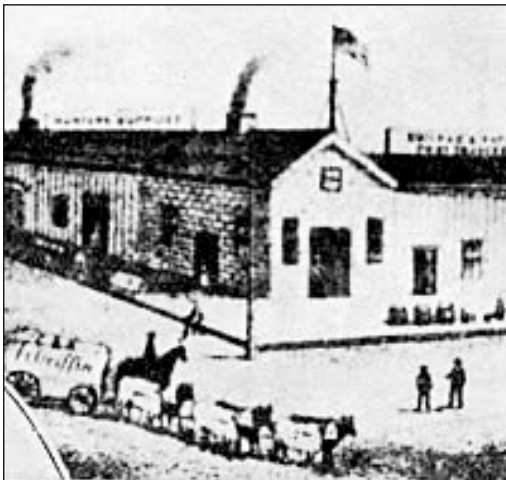
White officers such as Benjamin Grierson and Ranald Mackenzie usually commanded the African American units. Occasionally, however, African American officers such as Henry O. Flipper commanded the units. The men were trained and equipped and began a long and proud history. During the Indian Wars thirteen enlisted men and six officers from these four regiments earned the Medal of Honor. In addition to the military campaigns, the Buffalo Soldiers served a variety of roles along the frontier from building roads to escorting the U.S. mail along its route.

Cheyenne Indian warriors, out of respect for their fierce fighting ability and physical appearance, gave the nickname “Buffalo Soldiers” to the African American soldiers in 1867. In the late 1800s to 1900s, Buffalo Soldiers were consistently assigned to the toughest and harshest posts. The Buffalo Soldiers were sent after raiding parties, outlaws, rustlers and Mexican revolutionaries. They were sent to help map the Southwest, establish new posts and string telegraph lines. As prospectors and settlers moved into the Southwest, the Buffalo Soldiers were there to offer protection. In 1867, the 10th Cavalry was transferred from Fort Riley, Kansas to Texas, where it joined the 9th Cavalry.

Army units continued to be segregated until the Korean War. The 24th Infantry Regiment was the last segregated regiment to engage in combat. The 24th was deactivated in 1951 and its soldiers were integrated into other units in Korea.

The Town of Fort Griffin

Fort Griffin attracted its share of camp followers, who mostly stayed along the flat land between Government Hill and the Clear Fork of the Brazos River. A shantytown developed there and was called The Flat. In 1874, D.M. Dowell organized the town and it came to be known as The Town of Fort Griffin.



Drawing of Sutler Store at Fort Griffin

As early as 1868, the Flat had become a place of general amusement for soldiers with gambling, saloons and prostitution. The town also attracted respectable businessmen and residents.

The town's primary business centered around equipping cattle drivers on the Great Western Cattle Trail, and outfitting buffalo hunters. A Masonic Lodge was built in 1878, and other businesses included a telegraph office, post office, drug store, hotels, several mercantile stores, a newspaper, bakery, tannery, livery stables, restaurants and shipping yards.

Buffalo Hunters and Cowboys

Hunting buffalo for their hides became a big business in the early 1870s. People in eastern U.S. cities demanded buffalo robes, which they used for coats and lap robes. In addition, it was discovered that buffalo hides made excellent machinery belts. With the increased use of belt-driven machines, the demand for hides soon exploded, leading to the great buffalo hunts. By 1874, hunters were bombarding the plains from Dodge City to the Town of Fort Griffin, which soon became an important hunter supply and buffalo hide shipping location. During this time, the town also got the nickname "Hide Town." But buffalo hunting as a business was short-lived as the Texas Plains were depleted of buffalo between the years of 1874-1878.

With the opening of the Western Cattle Trail that passed through the Clear Fork Country in 1875, the hide business in the Town of Fort Griffin gave up its status as an economic engine. By the end of the 1870s the Western or Dodge City Trail had surpassed the Chisholm Trail in the number of cattle that were moved to the train yards in Kansas. The Western Trail passed near Fort Griffin and the town became the last important supply post in route to Kansas and other points north.



Buffalo hunters with wagons full of hides

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Frontier Forts of Texas. Charles M. Robinson III. Lone Star Books, 1986.
A good book of short reports on the early forts.

If These Walls Could Speak: Historic Forts of Texas. Robert M. Utley. University of Texas Press, Austin, 1985.
The chapter on Fort Griffin begins on page 41.

The Frontier World of Fort Griffin: The Life and Death of a Western Town. Charles M. Robinson III.
Arthur H. Clark Co., 1992.
An interesting look at the “Flat” and its notorious characters and history.

Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars. Don Rickey Jr. University of Oklahoma Press, 1963.
A very good generic description of the daily life of the 1870s soldier.

Official Website of the Tonkawa Tribe of Oklahoma
www.tonkawatribe.com/main.htm

Official Website of the Lipan Apache Tribe of Texas
www.lipanapachetribe.com/Communitypages.html

Official Website of the Comanche Nation – Lawton, Oklahoma
www.comanchenation.com/index.html

Official Website of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma
www.kiowaok.com/mission.htm

**The following articles are available at the Handbook of Texas Online
(www.tshaonline.org):**

[Fort Griffin](#)

[Town of Fort Griffin](#)

[Shackelford County](#)

[Buffalo Soldiers](#)

[Comanche Indians](#)

[Tonkawa Indians](#)

[Apache Indians](#)

[Kiowa Indians](#)

FORT GRIFFIN FOCUS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

When was Fort Griffin established and when was it closed?

It was opened in 1867 and closed in 1881.

What was the purpose of the fort?

To protect the new Anglo settlements in the area from Native American attacks.

What Native American tribes were found in this area?

The Comanche, Kiowa and Tonkawa.

What is a sutler?

A person contracted by the military to run a store to supply goods on the post.

What type of cannon was mainly used at Fort Griffin?

The Mountain Howitzer. It was lighter than other cannons and could be transported with little effort on the frontier as compared to larger cannon types.

How many loaves of bread were made daily to feed the troops?

800 loaves were baked and consumed daily.

What were the functions of the Infantry, the Artillery and the Cavalry?

The **Infantry** were foot soldiers that protected the camp, escorted wagon trains and helped build telegraph lines.

The **Artillery** maintained and operated the mountain howitzers.

The **Cavalry** were mounted horse soldiers who patrolled and responded quickly to possible attacks or raids.

What is the difference between a saber and a sword? Who used the saber?

A sword has a straight blade and a saber has a curved blade. Cavalry soldiers carried sabers.

What is a mess hall?

A tent or building where food is cooked and served.

Who was Fort Griffin named for?

Charles Griffin, who died of yellow fever on September 15, 1867, shortly after assuming command of the 5th Military District, including Texas.

What was Fort Griffin's original name?

It was originally called Camp Wilson.

What is a Buffalo Soldier?

African American soldiers were given the name by the Cheyenne out of respect for their fierce fighting abilities. Use of the term became widespread during the Indian Wars period to identify all African American troops.

FORT GRIFFIN VOCABULARY

American Bison	American Bison are large humped brown bovids (kin to cattle) with shaggy manes, large heads and short horns. They once roamed the North American plains in the millions and were often referred to as "buffalo."
Black Powder	Black powder was a highly explosive gun powder mixture made from charcoal, sulfur and potassium nitrate; used in firearms prior to the 20th century; very corrosive.
Buffalo	Buffalo are actually large bovine animals found in Africa and Asia, but the American Bison of the Great Plains and northern woodlands of North America were mistakenly given this name by the early explorers and settlers in the region.
Buffalo Soldiers	Buffalo Soldier was the title given to African American cavalrymen during the Indian Wars period by the Native Americans who thought the soldiers' fighting ability and appearance reminded them of the buffalo.
Cavalry	The Cavalry was one of the principal branches of the U. S. Army and of other armies, and consisted of soldiers mounted on horseback.
Chuck Wagon	The chuck wagon was a wheeled wooden vehicle, drawn by mules or horses, usually driven by the cook, that traveled with the trail drives during roundups. It was set up as a traveling kitchen for the cowhands and carried food, cooking equipment and tools.
Comanche	The Comanche are a Native American ethnic group that migrated from the upper Platte River in Wyoming. They followed the wild horses, which helped them hunt buffalo, to the southern plains where they displaced other indigenous tribes.
Dutch Oven	A Dutch Oven is a heavy cooking pot, usually of cast iron or enamel-on-iron, with a heavy cover.
Fife	A fife is a small, shrill-toned flute that can be heard over long distances. It was used by the army to transmit signals during battle because it could be heard above the gunfire.
Hardtack	Hardtack is a simple type of cracker or biscuit, made from flour, water and salt. Inexpensive and long-lasting, it was used for sustenance in the absence of perishable foods, commonly during long sea voyages and military campaigns. It has been known by other names such as "sea biscuit," "tooth dullers," "sheet iron" or "molar breakers."

Haversack	A haversack is a bag with a single strap, which is designed to be worn over one shoulder, or crossed across the chest if the haversack is particularly heavy. Soldiers carried a small amount of food in their haversacks, along with other important supplies.
Kepi	A kepi is a cap with a flat circular top and a visor. The U.S. military used the kepi during the Civil War and Indian War periods. Officially called a forage cap, it was nicknamed "bummers cap" by troops, being described as being "shapeless as a feedbag."
Kiowa	The Kiowa is a tribe of Native Americans who lived in northern Texas and western Oklahoma, hunted buffalo and were friends of the Comanche. Their language, Tanoan, suggests that they may be related to the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico.
Minie Ball	A Minie Ball is a type of muzzle-loading rifle bullet. The adoption of this ammunition allowed riflemen to fire several aimed shots per minute.
Mountain Howitzer	The Mountain Howitzer was a lightweight cannon used during the Civil War and Indian Wars.
Petticoat	A petticoat , or underskirt, is an article of clothing for women; specifically a separate undergarment hanging from the waist to be worn under a skirt or dress. They were worn to give fullness to skirts, and during cold weather many could be worn at once for warmth.
Reveille	Reveille is a bugle call most often associated with the military; it is chiefly used to wake military personnel at sunrise.
Saber	A saber is a heavy, one-edged sword with a thick-backed blade, often curved, and was carried by the cavalry.
Sutlers	Sutlers were civilians who sold provisions to an army in the field, in camp or in quarters. They built their stores within the limits of an army post or just off the defense line, and were frequently the only local suppliers of non-military goods.
Tonkawa	The Tonkawa tribe originally lived in the Edwards Plateau region of central Texas. They were pushed out of their traditional lands by the Comanche. Tonkawa warriors were often used as scouts for the U.S. Army during the Indian Wars.

FILL IN THE BLANK ACTIVITY

Use the Fort Griffin vocabulary words to fill in the blanks below.

1. _____ A bag slung over the shoulder to carry rations.
2. _____ Large humped cow-like animals with shaggy manes, large heads and short horns that roamed the plains. They were revered by many Native American groups and are often called "buffalo."
3. _____ A skirt or loose garment hanging from the waist; an underskirt.
4. _____ A title given to African American cavalrymen after the Civil War by Native Americans because of their resemblance to a sacred animal.
5. _____ Peddlers who followed the Army to sell goods and supplies to the soldiers.
6. _____ Native Americans who were pushed out of their original lands by the Comanche. Many of them acted as scouts for the Army.
7. _____ A bugle tune played in the morning to wake up the soldiers.
8. _____ A horse-drawn vehicle that followed the trail drives and roundups. It was set up as a traveling kitchen for the cowhands.
9. _____ A small, shrill-sounding flute that can be heard over long distances and above gunfire. It was used by the Army to transmit signals during battle.
10. _____ A heavy cooking pot, usually of cast iron or enamel, with a heavy cover.
11. _____ A lightweight cannon used during the Civil War and Indian Wars.
12. _____ One of the main branches of the U. S. Army; it consisted of soldiers riding and fighting on horses.
13. _____ A simple type of cracker or biscuit, made from flour, water and salt. It was also called a "molar breaker."

WORD SEARCH ACTIVITY

Circle the vocabulary words listed below. (Hint: Words can also be written backwards)

Black Powder
Minie Ball

Buffalo
Kepi

Cavalry
Kiowa

Chuck wagon
Saber

Comanche
Sutlers

S	Q	X	D	P	C	L	H	N	T	P	F	I	K	G
U	S	F	U	X	M	I	N	I	E	B	A	L	L	K
T	R	Z	U	O	X	B	O	K	P	V	H	M	G	Y
L	E	Y	N	N	O	K	O	H	T	G	I	V	N	Q
E	D	D	M	C	H	U	C	K	W	A	G	O	N	G
R	W	K	X	H	W	E	H	C	N	A	M	O	C	F
S	O	N	B	D	A	R	Q	C	T	S	K	R	E	H
E	P	L	D	P	M	U	F	W	X	I	P	E	L	Y
H	K	V	A	S	B	Y	J	L	T	Z	Y	B	K	R
K	C	W	Z	F	R	O	J	R	C	W	O	A	E	V
T	A	X	T	L	F	D	L	R	S	A	B	S	P	P
V	L	V	A	P	B	U	J	L	K	E	A	X	I	R
L	B	V	V	X	Q	M	B	H	R	Y	A	N	G	U
T	A	N	W	B	C	U	K	I	O	W	A	T	J	S
C	R	J	H	P	X	V	N	J	A	S	N	J	C	W

ANSWER KEYS

Fill in the Blank Activity

1. Haversack
2. American bison
3. Petticoat
4. Buffalo Soldiers
5. Sutlers
6. Tonkawa
7. Reveille
8. Chuck wagon
9. Fife
10. Dutch oven
11. Mountain Howitzer
12. Cavalry
13. Hardtack

Word Search Activity

S	Q	X	D	P	C	L	H	N	T	P	F	I	K	G
U	S	F	U	X	M	I	N	I	E	B	A	L	L	K
T	R	Z	U	O	X	B	O	K	P	V	H	M	G	Y
L	E	Y	N	N	O	K	O	H	T	G	I	V	N	Q
E	D	D	M	C	H	U	C	K	W	A	G	O	N	G
R	W	K	X	H	W	E	H	C	N	A	M	O	C	F
S	O	N	B	D	A	R	Q	C	T	S	K	R	E	H
E	P	L	D	P	M	U	F	W	X	I	P	E	L	Y
H	K	V	A	S	B	Y	J	L	T	Z	Y	B	K	R
K	C	W	Z	F	R	O	J	R	C	W	O	A	E	V
T	A	X	T	L	F	D	L	R	S	A	B	S	P	P
V	L	V	A	P	B	U	J	L	K	E	A	X	I	R
L	B	V	V	X	Q	M	B	H	R	Y	A	N	G	U
T	A	N	W	B	C	U	K	I	O	W	A	T	J	S
C	R	J	H	P	X	V	N	J	A	S	N	J	C	W

TEXAS LONGHORN EDUCATION PROGRAM

Program Location

Cattle pens at campground

Duration

1-2 Hours

Program Overview

During this program, students will learn the answers to the following focus questions and get to see and touch the skulls and hides of longhorns. They will also be able to view several live longhorns from the Texas State Longhorn Herd.

Focus Questions:

- What is the difference between longhorn cattle and other cattle breeds?
- How do the longhorns help the ecosystem?
- What caused the longhorn cattle breed to near extinction?
- How were they saved from extinction?

Introducing the Texas Longhorn

Ancestors of longhorn cattle arrived in the Americas with Columbus on his second voyage to Santo Domingo in 1493. Descendants of these cattle developed into the wild and tough Texas longhorn of legend and western lore.

By the end of the Civil War, millions of longhorns roamed wild, providing a marketable commodity for the devastated Texas economy. Men returning from the Civil War rounded up stray cattle, called mavericks, and drove them to the beef-starved Northern markets, thus helping to save Texas from economic ruin.

Over the next several decades, more than 10 million head of longhorns were rounded up and driven hundreds of miles north to markets along the Goodnight-Loving Trail, the Chisholm Trail, the Dodge City Trail and other cattle trails. These cattle trails led from Texas to Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, North and South Dakota, and up into Canada. The cattle drives marked the beginnings of the ranching industry in Texas.

The most popular longhorn in Texas today is the mascot at the University of Texas at Austin named Bevo. From the Official Texas State Herd, four steers have been chosen as Bevo.

What Makes a Texas Longhorn?

Other than the size of their horns, there are several important differences between Texas longhorns and other cattle. The Texas longhorn is considered the only cattle breed in the world that has developed exclusively by natural selection. The Texas longhorn developed over several centuries from wild Spanish herds. Longhorn cows are generally small-framed and have more calves than other breeds.

Longhorns are extremely well-adapted to the Texas climate. The diet of a longhorn cow on native range is much more varied than the diet of a typical beef cow. She will eat much more forbs (broadleaf plants) and browse (leaves of woody plants) other plants in addition to grass, which helps to maintain a better balance of vegetation (biological diversity) in the ecosystem. The longhorn also has the natural ability and inclination to travel further from water to graze than most cattle, allowing for more uniform use of grazing resources and preventing areas of overgrazing.

Longhorns can use their horns to aid in grazing. They lift brush out of the way to reach grasses and other plants underneath. The horns continue to grow for the whole life of the animal, and they are never shed. Typical horn length for mature cows and bulls is four to five feet, but the horns of a mature steer can grow five to seven feet. The horns of a longhorn are curved forward and up, which aids in fighting with other bulls and predators. A longhorn cow can stand in one spot, with her calf under her belly or neck, and by moving her head side-to-side and kicking with either hind foot, protect herself and her calf from multiple predators. Her horns protect her front, her calf, and her sides, and her feet protect the rear.

Longhorns were bred to near extinction due to cross breeding with other breeds. The State Herd does everything possible to maintain “pure” longhorn genetics in their animals. They exhibit all the characteristics that comprise the historic Texas longhorn: a moderate frame size, calving ease, mothering ability, ability to survive in climatic extremes on minimal forage, typical horn shapes, typical body types that travel well and natural resistance to insects and parasites.

Texas State Longhorn Herd History

The history of the Fort Griffin herd began in 1936 when Fort Worth businessman Sid Richardson believed that Texas Longhorns would soon be extinct and discussed the possibility of assembling a state longhorn herd with notable Texas historian J. Frank Dobie. They agreed that Richardson would provide the funding for this project and Dobie would find and select the longhorns. Dobie enlisted the help of rancher and longhorn raiser, Graves Peeler, who, at one time, owned the largest herd of longhorns in the world.

Dobie and Peeler traveled throughout South Texas and selected 20 longhorn cattle, but they needed a place to put them. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department volunteered to assist with the project and the longhorns were placed at Lake Corpus Christi State Park. Richardson then asked Dobie and Peeler to locate another herd. It was difficult to find more; they had to drive hundreds of miles and both sides of the Rio Grande. In the end, they located a few more longhorns and these were placed at Lake Brownwood State Park.

Unfortunately, there were problems with the longhorns at both parks. At Lake Brownwood State Park, picnickers were concerned about the cattle as were neighboring ranchers who believed the longhorns would escape and mix with their cattle. At Lake Corpus Christi State Park, visitors were also uneasy with the free roaming longhorns.

Eventually, all the longhorns at Lake Brownwood State Park were moved to Lake Corpus Christi State Park. In 1948, all the longhorns at Lake Corpus Christi State Park were rounded up and 21 of the longhorns were moved to Fort Griffin State Park. The remaining 40 animals were sold.

In 1969, the 61st Legislature passed Senate Resolution No. 79, which recognized the longhorn herd at Fort Griffin as the Official State of Texas Longhorn Herd.

Between 1980 and 1988, Fort Griffin entered longhorns in competitive shows and won more than 16 awards. The most prestigious awards received at the Fort Worth Livestock Show included the 1987 World Grand Champion Cow, the 1987 World Grand Champion Senior Cow, and the 1984 World Champion Steer.

Longhorns: Stars of the Show!

In 1938, Albany native Robert Nail produced a play put on by local high school seniors. It was so popular that it soon grew into a city-wide production involving many of the city's residents. This production, called the "Fandangle," is recognized as the oldest outdoor musical in Texas. The show is different every year and blends new songs with favorites from past years' productions. In 1951, the Fandangle Association requested the use of longhorns from Fort Griffin, which provided 15 to 20 steers for the play. Since then, the steers from Fort Griffin have never missed a show.